

AN  
E X P O S I T I O N,

WITH  
PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS,

OF THE PROPHECY OF  
ZEPHANIAH.

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This prophet is placed last, as he was last in time, of all the minor prophets before the captivity, and not long before Jeremiah, who lived at the time of the captivity. He foretells the general destruction of Judah and Jerusalem by the Chaldeans, and sets their sins in order before them, which had provoked God to bring their ruin upon them; calls them to repentance; threatens the neighbouring nations with the like destructions, and gives encouraging promises of their joyful return out of captivity in due time, which have a reference to the grace of the gospel. We have, in the first verse, an account of the prophet, and the date of his prophecy, which supersedes our inquiry concerning them here.

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ZEPHANIAH, I.

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CHAP. I.

After the title of the book, (v. 1.) here is, I. A threatening of the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem, an utter destruction, by the Chaldeans, v. 2.. 4. II. A charge against them for their gross sin, which provoked God to bring that destruction upon them; (v. 5, 6.) and so he goes on in the rest of the chapter, setting both the judgments before them, that they might prevent them or prepare for them; and the sins that destroy them, that they might judge themselves, and justify God in what was brought upon them. 1. They must hold their peace because they had greatly sinned, v. 7... 9. But, 2. They shall howl because the trouble will be great. The day of the Lord is near, and it will be a terrible day, v. 10... 18. Such fair and timely warning as this did God give to the Jews of the approaching captivity; but they hardened their neck, which made their destruction remediless.

1. **T**HE word of the LORD which came unto Zephaniah the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hizkiah, in the days of Josiah the son of Amnon king of Judah. 2. I will utterly consume all *things* from off the land, saith the LORD. 3. I will consume man and beast; I will consume the fowls of the heaven, and the fishes of the sea; and the stumbling-blocks with the wicked; and I will cut off man from off the land, saith the LORD. 4. I will also stretch out my hand upon *Jehoiakim*, and upon all the inhabitants of

Jerusalem; and I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place, *and* the name of the Chemarims with the priests; 5. And them that worship the host of heaven upon the house-tops; and them that worship *and* that swear by the LORD, and that swear by Malcham; 6. And them that are turned back from the LORD; and *those* that have not sought the LORD, nor inquired for him.

Here is,

I. The title-page of this book, (v. 1.) in which we observe, 1. What authority it has, and who gave it that authority; it is from heaven and not of men. It is *the word of the Lord*. 2. Who was the instrument of conveying it to the church. His name *Zephaniah*, which signifies the *servant of the Lord*, for God revealed his secrets to his servants the prophets. The pedigree of other prophets, whose extraction we have an account of, goes no further back than their father, except Zecharias, whose grandfather also is named. But this of Zephaniah goes back four generations, and the highest mentioned is *Hizkiah*; it is the very same name in the original with that of Hezekiah king of Judah, (2 Kings xviii. 1.) and refers, probably, to him; if so, our prophet, being lineally descended from that pious prince, and being of the royal family, could with the better grace reprove the folly of the *king's children* as he does, v. 8. 3. When this prophet prophesied; *in the days of Josiah king of Judah*, who reigned well, and in the twelfth year of his reign

began vigorously, and carried on a work of reformation, in which he destroyed idols and idolatry. Now it does not appear whether Zephaniah prophesied in the beginning of his reign; if so, we may suppose his prophesying had a great and good influence in that reformation. When he, as God's messenger, *reproved* the idolatries of Jerusalem, Josiah, as God's vicegerent, *removed* them; and reformation is likely *then* to go on and prosper, when both magistrates and ministers do their part towards it. If it were toward the latter end of his reign that he prophesied, we sadly see how a corrupt people relapse into their former distempers. The idolatries Josiah had abolished, it should seem, returned in his own time, when the heat of the reformation began a little to abate and wear off. What good can the best reformers do with a people that *hate* to be reformed, as if they *longed* to be ruined?

II. The summary, or contents, of this book; the general proposition contained in it, is, that utter destruction is coming apace upon Judah and Jerusalem for sin. Without preamble, or apology, he begins abruptly, (v. 2.) *By taking away I will make an end of all things from off the face of the land, saith the Lord.* Ruin is coming, utter ruin; destruction from the Almighty; he has said it, who can, and will, make good what he has said; *"I will utterly consume all things. I will gather all things;"* (so some;) *"I will recall all the blessings I have bestowed, because they have abused them, and so forfeited them."*

The consumption determined shall take away,

1. The inferior creatures; *I will consume the beasts, the fowls of the heaven, and the fishes of the sea;* (v. 3.) as, in the deluge, *every living substance was destroyed that was upon the face of the ground,* Gen. vii. 23. The creatures were made for man's use, and therefore when he has perverted the use of them, and made them *subject to vanity*, God, to show the greatness of his displeasure against the sin of man, involves them in his punishment. The expressions are figurative, speaking universal desolation. Those that fly ever so high, as the fowls of heaven, and think themselves out of the reach of the enemies' hand; those that hide ever so close, as the fishes of the sea, and think themselves out of the reach of the enemies' eye, shall yet become a prey to them, and be utterly consumed.

2. The children of men; *"I will consume man, I will cut off man from the land."* The land shall be dispeopled and left uninhabited; I will destroy, not only Israel, but *man*. The land shall enjoy her sabbaths. I will *cut off*, not only the *wicked men*, but *all men*; even the few among them that are *good*, shall be involved in this common calamity. Though they shall not be *cut off* from the Lord, yet they shall be *cut off from the land.* It is with Judah and Jerusalem that God has this quarrel, both city and country, and upon them he will *stretch out his hand*, the hand of his power, the hand of his wrath; and who knows the power of his anger? v. 4. They that will not humble themselves under God's mighty hand, shall be humbled and brought down by it. Note, Even Judah, where God is known, and Jerusalem, where his dwelling-place is, if they revolt from him, and rebel against him, shall have his hand *stretched out* against them.

3. All wicked people, and all those things that are the matter of their wickedness; (v. 3.) *"I will consume the stumbling-blocks with the wicked, the idols with the idolaters, the offences with the offenders."* Josiah had taken away the stumbling-blocks, and, as far as he could, had purged the land of the monuments of idolatry, hoping that there would be no more idolatry, but *the wicked will do wickedly*, the dog will return to his vomit, and therefore, since the sin will not otherwise be cured,

the *sinners* must themselves be consumed; even the *wicked with the stumbling-blocks* of their iniquity. Ezek. xiv. 3. Since it was not done by the sword of justice, it shall be done by the sword of war. See who the sinners are, that shall be consumed.

(1.) The professed idolaters, who *avowed* idolatry, and were *wedded* to it. The *remnant of Baal* shall be *cut off*, the images of Baal, and the worshippers of those images. Josiah cut off a great deal of Baal; but that which was so *close* as to escape the eye, or so *bold* as to escape the hand, of his justice, God will cut off, even all the remains of it. The Chaldeans would spare none of the images of Baal, or the worshippers of those images. The *Chemarims* shall be *cut off*; we read of them in the history of Josiah's reformation; (2 Kings xxiii. 5.) *He put down the idolatrous priests*, the word is the *Chemarim*. The word signifies *black men*; some think because they wore black clothes, affecting to appear grave; others, because their faces were black with attending the altars, or the fires in which they burnt their children to Moloch. They seem to have been immediate attendants upon the service of Baal; they shall be *cut off with the priests*, the regulars with the seculars. The very name of them shall be *cut off*; the order shall be quite abolished, so as to be forgotten, or remembered with detestation. And among other idolaters, the *worshippers of the host of heaven upon the house-tops* shall be cut off, (v. 5.) who justified themselves in their idolatry with them that did not worship images, the work of their own hands, but *offered their sacrifices, and burnt their incense, to the sun, moon, and stars*, immediately upon the tops of their houses; but God will let them know that he is a jealous God, and will not endure any rival; and though some have thought that the most specious and plausible idolatry, yet it will appear as great an offence to God, to give divine honours to a *star*, as to give them to a *stone* or a *stock*. Even the worshippers of the *host of heaven* shall be consumed as well as the worshippers of the beasts of the earth, or the fiends of hell. The sin of the adulteress is not the less sinful for the gaiety of the adulterer.

(2.) Those also shall be consumed, that think to compound the matter between God and idols, and keep an even hand between them; that halt between God and Baal, and *worship* between Jehovah and Moloch, and *swear by both*; or, as it might better be read, *swear to the Lord, and to Malcham*. They bind themselves by oath and covenant to the service both of God and idols; they have a good opinion of the worship of the God of Israel, it is the religion of their country, and has been long so, and therefore they will by no means quit it; but they think it will be very much improved and beautified if they join with it the worship of Moloch, for that also is much used in other countries, and travellers admire it, there is a great deal of good fancy and strong flame in it. They cannot keep always to the worship of a God whom they have no visible representation of, and therefore they must have an image: and what better than the image of *Moloch—a king*? They think they shall effectually atone for their sin, if they *swear to Moloch*, and, pursuant to that oath, burn their children in sacrifice to that idol; and yet if they do amiss in that, they hope to atone for it in worshipping the God of Israel too. Note, Those that think to divide their affections and adorations between God and idols, will not only come short of acceptance with God, but will have their doom with the worst of idolaters; for what communion can there be between light and darkness, Christ and Belial, God and Mammon? She whose own child is not, pleads for the dividing of it, for if Satan have half, he will have all; but the true mother says, *Divide it not*, for if God have but

half, he will have none. Such waters will not be long sweet, if they come from a fountain that sends forth bitter water too; what have they to do to swear by the Lord, that swear by Malcham?

(3.) Those also shall be consumed, that have apostatized from God, together with those that never gave up their names to him, *v. 6.* I will cut off, [1.] *Them that are turned back from the Lord;* that were well taught, and began well, that had given up their names to him, and set out at first in the worship of him, but have flown off, and turned aside, and fallen in with idolaters, but deserted those good ways of God, which they were brought up in, and despised them; those God will be sure to reckon with, who are renegadoes from his service, who began in the Spirit, and ended in the flesh; they shall be treated as deserters, to whom no mercy is showed. [2.] *Those that have not sought the Lord,* nor ever inquired for him, never made any profession of religion, and think to excuse themselves with that, shall find that this will not excuse them; nay, that is the thing laid to their charge; they are atheistical, careless people, that *live without God in the world;* and those that do so, are certainly unworthy to live upon God in the world.

7. Hold thy peace at the presence of the Lord God; for the day of the Lord is at hand: for the Lord hath prepared a sacrifice, he hath bid his guests. 8. And it shall come to pass in the day of the Lord's sacrifice, that I will punish the princes, and the king's children, and all such as are clothed with strange apparel. 9. In the same day also will I punish all those that leap on the threshold, which fill their masters' houses with violence and deceit. 10. And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord, that there shall be the noise of a cry from the fish-gate, and a howling from the second, and a great crashing from the hills. 11. Howl, ye inhabitants of Maktesh, for all the merchant people are cut down; all they that bear silver are cut off. 12. And it shall come to pass at that time, that I will search Jerusalem with candles, and punish the men that are settled on their lees; that say in their heart, The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil. 13. Therefore their goods shall become a booty, and their houses a desolation: they shall also build houses, but not inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, but not drink the wine thereof.

Notice is here given to Judah and Jerusalem, that God is coming forth against them, and will be with them shortly; his presence, as a just Avenger, his day, the day of his judgment, and his wrath, are not far off, *v. 7.* Those that improve not the presence of God with them as a Father, but sin away that presence, may expect his presence with them as a Judge, to call them to an account for the contempt put upon his grace. The day of the Lord will come; men have their day now, when they take a liberty to do what they please, but God's day is at hand; it is here called his sacrifice, a sacrifice of his preparing; for the punishing of presumptuous sinners is a sacrifice to the justice of God, some reparation to his injured honour; they that brought

their offerings to other gods, were justly made themselves victims to the true God. On a day of sacrifice great slaughter was made; so shall there be in Jerusalem, men shall be killed up as fast as lambs for the altar, with as little regret, with as much pleasure; *The slain of the Lord shall be many.* On a day of sacrifice great feasts were made upon the sacrifices; so the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem shall be feasted upon by their enemies the Chaldeans; these are the guests God has prepared and invited to come and glut themselves—their revenge with slaughter, and their covetousness with plunder. Now observe,

1. Who they are, that are marked to be sacrificed, that shall be visited and punished in this day of reckoning, and what it is they shall be called to an account for.

1. The royal family, because of the dignity of their place, shall be first reckoned with for their pride, and vanity, and affectation; (*v. 8.*) *I will punish the princes, and the king's children,* who think themselves exempt from punishment; they shall find themselves accountable to God, and that, high as they are, he is above them. They shall be punished, and all such as, like them, are clothed with strange apparel, such as, in contempt of their own country, (where, probably, it was the custom to go in a very plain dress, as became the seed of Jacob that plain man,) affected to appear in the fashion of other nations, and introduced their modes in apparel; studying to resemble those from whom God had appointed them, even in their clothes, industriously to distinguish themselves. The princes and the king's children, scorned to wear any home-made stuffs, though God had provided them fine linen and silks, (*Ezek. xvi. 10.*) but they must send abroad to strange countries for their clothes, which would not please unless they were far-fetched and dear-bought; and even those of inferior rank affected to imitate the princes, and the king's children. Pride in apparel is displeasing to God, and a symptom of the degeneracy of a people.

2. The noblemen, and their stewards and servants, come next to be reckoned with; (*v. 9.*) *In the same day will I punish those that leap on the threshold;* a phrase, no doubt, well understood then, which probably signified the invading of their neighbours' rights; entering their houses by force and violence, and seizing their possessions, they leap on the threshold; as much as to say, the house is their own, and they will keep their hold of it; and, accordingly, they make all in it their own that they can lay their hands on, and so fill their masters' houses with goods gotten by violence and deceit, and with all the goods thereby contracted. Nor shall it suffice them to say, that the ill-gotten gains were not for themselves, but for their masters, and that what they did was by their order; for the obligations we lie under to keep God's commandments, are prior and superior to the obligations we lie under to serve the interests of any master on earth.

3. The trading people, and the rich merchants, are next called to account; iniquity is found in their end of the town, among the inhabitants of Maktesh, a low part of Jerusalem, deep like a mortar; (for so the word signifies;) the goldsmiths lived there, (*Neh. iii. 32.*) and the merchants: and they are now cut down, they are broken, and have shut up their shops, and become bankrupts; nay, *All they that bear silver are cut off,* in the first place, by the invaders, for the sake of the silver they carry, which is so far from being a protection to them, that it will expose and betray them. The conquerors aimed at the wealthy men, and carried them off first, while the poor of the land escaped. Or, it may be meant of a general decay of trade, which was a pre

face and introduction to the general destruction of the land. It is the token of a declining state, when great dealers are cut down, and great bankers are cut off, and become bankrupts, who cannot fall alone, but with themselves ruin many.

4. All the secure and careless people, the sons of pleasure, that live a loose, idle life, are next reckoned with; (v. 12.) they come from all parts of the country, to take up their quarters in the head-quarters of the kingdom, where they take private lodgings, and indulge themselves in ease and luxury; but God will find them out, and punish them; *At that time I will search Jerusalem with candles*, to discover them, that they may be brought out to condign punishment. This intimates that they conceal themselves, as being either ashamed of the sin, or afraid of the punishment of it; when the judgments of God are abroad, they hope to escape by absconding, and getting out of the way; but God will search Jerusalem, as search is made for a malefactor in disguise, that is harboured by his accomplices; God's hand will find out all his enemies, wherever they lie hid, and will punish not only the secret idolaters, but the secret epicures and profane; and those are they that are here described, and marks are given by which they will be discovered when strict search is made for them. (1.) Their dispositions are sensual; they are settled on their lees; intoxicated with their pleasures, strengthening themselves in their wealth and wickedness, they are secure and easy, and, because they have had no changes, they fear none, as Moab, Jer. xlviii. 11. *They had not been emptied from vessel to vessel. They fill themselves with wine and strong drink*, and banish all thought, saying, *To-morrow shall be as this day*, Isa. lvi. 12. Their being settled on their lees, signifies the same with being enclosed in their own fat, Ps. xvii. 10. (2.) Their notions are atheistical; they could not live such loose lives, but that they say in their heart, *The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil*; that is, *He will do nothing*. They deny his providential government in the world; "What good and evil there is in the world, comes by the wheel of fortune, and not by the disposal of a wise and supreme Director." They deny his moral government, and his dispensing of rewards and punishments; "*The Lord will not do good to those that serve him, nor do evil to those that rebel against him; and therefore there is nothing got by religion, nor lost by sin.*" This is the effect of their sensuality; if they were not drowned in sense, they could not be thus senseless, nor could they be so stupid, if they had not stupefied themselves with the love of pleasure. It was also the cause of their sensuality; men would not make a god of their belly, if they had not at first become so vain, so vile in their imaginations, as to think the God that made them altogether such a one as themselves. But God will punish them, their end is destruction, Phil. iii. 19.

II. What the destruction will be, with which God will punish these sinners, and what course he will take with them. 1. He will silence them; (v. 7.) *Hold thy peace at the presence of the Lord*. He will force them to hold their peace, will strike them dumb with horror and amazement: they shall be speechless, all the excuses of their sin, and exceptions against the sentence, will be overruled, and they shall not have a word to say for themselves. 2. He will sacrifice them, for it is the day of the Lord's sacrifice; (v. 8.) he will give them into the hands of their enemies, and glorify himself thereby. 3. He will fill both city and country with lamentations; (v. 10.) *In that day there shall be the noise of a cry from the fish-gate*, so called because near either to the fish-ponds or to the fish-market. It belonged to the city of David; (2 Chron. xxxiii. 14. Neh. in

3.) perhaps the same with that which is called the *first-gate*, (Zech. xiv. 10.) and if so, it will explain what follows here, *And a howling from the second*, that is, the second gate, which was next to that *fish-gate*. The alarm shall go round the walls of Jerusalem, from gate to gate; and there shall be a great crashing from the hills, a mighty noise from the mountains round about Jerusalem, either from the acclamations of the victorious invaders, or from the lamentations of the timorous invaded, or from both. The inhabitants of the city, even of the closest, safest part of the city, shall howl; (v. 11.) so clamorous shall the grief be. 4. They shall be stripped of all they have, it shall be a prey to the enemy; (v. 13.) *Their household goods, and shop goods, shall become a booty*, and a rich booty they shall be, *their houses shall be levelled with the ground*, and be a desolation; those of them that have built new houses, shall not inherit them, but the invaders shall get and keep possession of them. And the vineyards they have planted they shall not drink the wine of, but instead of having it for the relief of their friends that faint among them, they shall part with it for the animating of their foes that fight against them, Deut. xxviii. 30.

14. The great day of the LORD is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the LORD: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly. 15. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness. 16. A day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities, and against the high towers. 17. And I will bring distress upon men, that they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the LORD: and their blood shall be poured out as dust, and their flesh as the dung. 18. Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD's wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy: for he shall make even a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land.

Nothing could be expressed with more spirit and life, nor in words more proper to startle and awaken a secure and careless people, than the warning here given to Judah and Jerusalem, of the approaching destruction by the Chaldeans. That is enough to make the sinners in Zion tremble—that it is the day of the Lord, the day in which he will manifest himself by taking vengeance on them. It is the great day of the Lord, a specimen of the day of judgment, a kind of doom's-day, as the last destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans is represented to be in our Saviour's prediction concerning it, Matt. xxiv. 27.

1. This day of the Lord is here spoken of as very near; the vision is not for a great while to come, as those imagine who put the evil day far from them; they deceive themselves who look upon it as a thing at a distance, for it is near, it is near, it hastens greatly. The prophet gives the alarm like one that is in earnest, like one that awakens a family with the cry of, *Fire, fire*, when it is at next door that the danger is; "*It is near, it is near*, and therefore it is high time to bestir yourselves, and do what you can for your own safety before it be too late." It is madness for those to *slumber*, whose

*damnation slumbers not, and to linger when it has-ens.*

2. It is spoken of as a very dreadful day; the very *voice of this day of the Lord*, the noise of it, when it is coming, shall be so terrible, as to make the *mighty men cry there bitterly*, cry for fear as children do. *It shall be a vexation to hear the report of it.* In the last great day of the Lord the *mighty men shall cry bitterly* to rocks and mountains to shelter them; but in vain. Observe how emphatically the prophet speaks of this day *approaching*; (v. 15.) *It is a day of wrath*, God's wrath, wrath in perfection, wrath to the utmost. It will be a day of *trouble and distress* to the sinners, they shall be in pain, and shall see no ways of easing or helping themselves. The miseries of the damned are summed up (perhaps with reference to this here,) in the *indignation and wrath of God*, which is the cause, and the *tribulation and anguish* of the sinner's soul, which is the effect, Rom. ii. 8, 9. It will be a day of *trouble and distress* to the inhabitants, and a day of *wasteness and desolation* to the whole land; that fruitful land shall be turned into a wilderness. It shall be a day of *darkness and gloominess*, every thing shall look dismal, and there shall not be the least gleam of comfort, or glimpse of hope; look round, and it is all black. *It is a day of clouds and thick darkness*; there is not only nothing encouraging, but every thing threatening; the thick clouds are big with storms and tempests.

3. It is spoken of as a *destroying day*, v. 16, 17. It shall be destroying, (1.) *To places*, even the strongest and best fortified; *A day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities*, to break into them; and against the *high towers*, to bring them down; for what forts, what fences can hold out against the wrath of God? (2.) *To persons*; (v. 17.) *I will bring distress upon men*, the strongest and stoutest of men; their hearts and hands shall fail them; they shall *walk like blind men*, wandering endlessly *because they have sinned against the Lord*. Note, Those that walk as *bad men*, will justly be left to walk as *blind men*, always in the dark, in doubt and danger, without any guide or comfort, and *falling at length into the ditch*. Because they have *sinned against the Lord* he will deliver them into the hands of cruel enemies, that shall *pour out their blood as dust*, so profusely, and with as little regret, and *their flesh shall be thrown as dung* upon the dunghill.

4. The destruction of that day will be *unavoidable and universal*, v. 18. (1.) There shall be no escaping it by ransom; *Neither their silver nor their gold*, which they have hoarded up so covetously against the evil day, or which they have spent so prodigally, to make friends for such a time, *shall be able to deliver them in the day of the Lord's wrath*. Another prophet borrowed these words from this, with reference to the same event, Ezek. vii. 19. Note, Riches profit not in the day of wrath, Prov. xi. 4. Nay, riches expose to the wrath of men, (Eccl. v. 13.) and riches abused to the wrath of God. (2.) There shall be no escaping it by flight or concealment; for the *whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy*; and where then can a hiding-place be found? See what the fire of God's jealousy is, and what the force of it: it will *devour whole lands*; how then can particular persons stand before it? He shall *make riddance, a speedy riddance, of all them that dwell in the land*; as the husbandman, when he *rids his ground*, cuts up all the briars and thorns for the fire. Note, Sometimes the judgments of God make riddance, even utter riddance, with sinful nations, a speedy riddance; their destruction is effected, is completed, in a little time. Let not sinners be laid asleep by the patience of God, for *when the measure of their iniquity is full*,

his justice will both overtake and overcome; will make quick work and thorough work.

## CHAP. II.

In this chapter we have, I. An earnest exhortation to the nation of the Jews to repent and make their peace with God, and so to prevent the judgments threatened before it was too late, (v. 1. 3.) and this inferred from the revelation of God's wrath against them in the foregoing chapter. II. A denunciation of the judgments of God against divers of the neighbouring nations that had assisted, or rejoiced, in the calamity of Israel. 1. The Philistines, v. 4. 7. 2. The Moabites and Ammonites, v. 8. 11. 3. The Ethiopians and Assyrians, v. 12. 15. All these shall drink of the same cup of trembling, that is put into the hands of God's people, as was also foretold by other prophets before and after.

1. **G**ATHER yourselves together, yea, gather together, O nation not desired; 2. Before the decree bring forth, *before* the day pass as the chaff, before the fierce anger of the LORD come upon you, before the day of the LORD's anger come upon you. 3. Seek ye the LORD, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the LORD's anger.

Here we see what the prophet meant in that terrible description of the approaching judgments, which we had in the foregoing chapter, from first to last; his design was, not to drive the people to despair, but to drive them to God and to their duty, not to frighten them out of their wits, but to frighten them out of their sins. In pursuance of that, he here calls them to repentance, national repentance, as the only way to prevent national ruin.

Observe,

1. The summons given them to a national assembly; (v. 1.) *Gather yourselves together*. He had told them, in the last words of the foregoing chapter, that God would make a *speedy riddance of all that dwell in the land*, upon which, one would think, it should follow, "Disperse yourselves, and flee for shelter where you can find a place." When the decree was absolutely gone forth for the last destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, that was the advice given, (Matth. xxiv. 16.) *Then let them which be in Judea, flee into the mountains*; but here it is otherwise. God warns, that he may not wound, threatens, that he may not strike, and therefore calls to the people to use means for the turning away of his wrath. The summons is given to a *nation not desired*. The word signifies either, (1.) *Not desiring*, that has not any desires toward God, or the remembrance of his name, is not desirous of his favour and grace, but very indifferent to it, has no mind to repent and reform; "Yet *come together*, and see if you can stir up desires in one another." Thus God is often found of those that *sought him not, nor asked for him*, Isa. lxv. 1. Or, (2.) *Not desirable*, no ways lovely, nor having any thing in them amiable, or which might recommend them to God. The land of Israel had been a *pleasant land, a land of delight*; (Dan. xi. 41.) but now it is unlovely, it is a *nation not desired*, to which God might justly say, *Depart from me*; but he says, "*Gather together to me*, and let us see if any expedient can be found out for the preventing of the ruin. *Gather together*, that you may in a body humble yourselves before God, may fast, and pray, and seek his face. *Gather together*, to consult among yourselves what is to be done in this critical

juncture, that every one may *consider of it*, may give and *take advice*, and *speak his mind*; and that what is done may be done by *consent*, and so may be a national act." Some read it, "*Inquire into yourselves*, yea, *inquire into yourselves*; examine your consciences, look into your hearts, search and try your ways; *inquire into yourselves*, that, you may find out the sin by which God has been provoked to this displeasure against you, and may find out the way of returning to him." Note, When God is contending with us, it concerns us to *inquire into ourselves*.

2. Arguments urged to press them to the utmost seriousness and expedition herein; (v. 2.) "Do it in earnest, do it with all speed before it be too late, *before the decree bring forth, before the day pass.*" The manner of speaking here is very lively and awakening, designed to make them apprehensive, (as all sinners are concerned to be.) (1.) That their danger is very great, that their all lies at stake, that it is a matter of life and death, which therefore well requires and well deserves the closest application of mind that can be. It is not a *trifle*, and therefore is not a thing to be *trifled about*. It is the *fierce anger of the Lord* that is kindled against them, and is just ready to kindle upon them; that *devouring fire* which none can *dwell with*, which none can make head against, or hold up their head under. "It is the *day of the Lord's anger*, the day set for the pouring out of the full vials of it, that you are threatened with, that *great day of the Lord*," spoken of, ch. i. 14. "Are you not concerned to prepare for *that day*?" (2.) That it is very imminent; "Bestir yourselves now quickly, *before the decree bring forth*, and then it will be too late, the opportunity will be lost, and never retrieved. The decree is as it were big with child, and it will *bring forth the day*, the terrible day, which shall *pass as chaff*, which shall hurry you away into captivity, as *chaff* before the wind." *We know not what a day may bring forth*, (Prov. xxvii. 1.) but we do know what the *decree will bring forth* against impenitent sinners, whom therefore it highly concerns to repent in time, in the *accepted time*. Note, It is the wisdom of those whom God has a controversy with, to agree with him quickly, while they are in the way, before his *fierce anger* comes upon them, not to be *turned away*. In a case of this nature delays are highly *dangerous*, and may be *fatal*; they will be so if by them the heart is hardened. How solicitous should we all be to make our peace with God *before* the Spirit withdraw from us, or cease to strive with us; *before* the day of grace be over, or the day of life; *before* our everlasting state shall be determined on the other side the great gulf fixed!

3. Directions prescribed for the doing of this effectually. It is not enough to gather together in a consternation, but they must seriously and calmly apply themselves to the duty of the day; (v. 3.) *Seek ye the Lord*: that they might find mercy with God they are here put upon *seeking*; for so is the rule, *Seek, and ye shall find*. A general call was given to the whole *nation*, to *gather together*, but little good is to be expected from the far greater part of them; if the land be saved, it must be by the interest and intercession of the *pious few*, and therefore to them the exhortation here is particularly directed. And observe, (1.) How they are *described*—they are the *meek of the earth*, or of the *land*. It is the distinguishing character of the people of God, that they are the *meek ones of the earth*; this is their badge, it is their livery: they are *modest*, and humble, and low in their own eyes, they are *mild* and gentle, and yielding to others, not soon angry, not very angry, not long angry, they are the *quiet in the land*, Ps. xxxv. 20. And they are *subject* and *submissive* to their God, to all his precepts

and all providences; actuated by this principle and disposition, they have *wrought his judgments*, have obeyed his laws, observed his institutions, have made conscience of their duty to him, and have laid out themselves for the advancement of his honour and interest in the world. (2.) What they are required to do; they must *seek*; which denotes both a *careful inquiry*, and a *constant endeavour*, that they may know and do their duty. [1.] They must *seek the Lord*, seek his favour and grace, address him upon all occasions, ask of him what they need, seek him early, seek him diligently, and continue seeking him. [2.] They must *seek righteousness*; "Seek to God for the performance of his promises to you, and see to it that you abound yet more in duty to him, seek for the righteousness of Christ to be imputed to you, for the graces of God's Spirit to be implanted in you; hunger and thirst after them." [3.] They must *seek meekness*; this is a grace they were so eminent for, that they were denominated the *meek of the land*; and yet this they must *seek*. Note, Those that are ever so good, must still strive to be better, those that have ever so much grace, must still be praying and labouring for more. Nay, those that excel in any particular grace, must still seek to excel yet more in that, because in that most assaults will be made upon them by their enemies, in that most is expected from them by their friends, and in that they are most apt to be themselves secure. *Si dixisti, sufficit, fieriisti—Say but, I am all that I ought to be, and you are undone*. In the difficult, trying times approaching, the meek will find exercise for all the meekness they have, and all little enough, and therefore should *seek* it earnestly, and pray that when God in his providence gives them occasion for it, he would by his grace enable them to exercise it, to *show all meekness to all men*, in all instances; that as the day is, so may the strength be.

4. Encouragements given to take these directions, *It may be, you shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger*. (1.) "You particularly that are the *meek of the earth*; though the day of the Lord's anger do come upon the land, yet you shall be safe, you shall be taken under special protection; *verily it shall be well with thy remnant*, Jer. xv. 11. *Thy life will I give unto thee for a prey*, Jer. xlv. 5. *I will deliver thee in that day*, Jer. xxxix. 17. *It may be, you shall be hid*; if any be hid, you shall." Good men cannot be sure of temporal preservation, for *all things come alike to all*, but they are most likely to be hid, and stand fairest for a distinguishing care of Providence. It is expressed thus doubtfully, to try if they will trust the goodness of God's nature, though they have but the '*it may be*' of a promise; and to keep up in them a holy fear and watchfulness, lest they should seem to come short, and should do any thing to throw themselves out of the divine protection. Note, Those that hold fast their integrity in times of common iniquity, have reason to hope that God will find out a hiding-place for them, where they shall be safe and easy in times of common calamity. They shall be hid (as Luther says) *aut in cælo, aut sub cælo—either in heaven, or under heaven*, either in the possession of heaven, or under the protection of heaven. Or, (2.) "You of this nation, though it be a *nation not desired*, yet, in the day of the Lord's anger with the neighbouring nations, when his judgments are abroad, *you shall be hid*, your land shall be preserved for the sake of those few meek ones that stand in the gap, to *turn away the wrath of God*." It concerns us all to make it sure to ourselves, that we shall be hid in the *great day* of God's wrath; and if we hide ourselves in chambers of duty, God will hide us in chambers of safety, Isa. xxvi. 20. If we prepare an ark, that shall be our hiding-place, Gen. vii. 1.



4. For Gaza shall be forsaken, and Ashkelon a desolation: they shall drive out Ashdod at the noon-day, and Ekron shall be rooted up. 5. Wo unto the inhabitants of the sea-coast, the nation of the Cherethites! the word of the LORD is against you; O Canaan, the land of the Philistines, I will even destroy thee, that there shall be no inhabitant. 6. And the sea-coast shall be dwellings and cottages for shepherds, and folds for flocks. 7. And the coast shall be for the remnant of the house of Judah; they shall feed thereupon: in the houses of Ashkelon shall they lie down in the evening; for the LORD their God shall visit them, and turn away their captivity.

The prophet here comes to foretell what share the neighbouring nations should have in the destructions made upon those parts of the world by Nebuchadnezzar and his victorious Chaldees, as other of the prophets did at that time; which is designed, (1.) To awaken the people of the Jews, by making them sensible how strong, how deep, how large, the inundation of the calamities should be, that *the day of the Lord*, which was near, might appear the more dreadful, and they might thereby be quickened to prepare for it as for a general deluge. (2.) To comfort them with this thought, that their case, though sad, should not be singular; (*Solamen miseris socios habuisse doloris*—the wretched find it consolatory to have companions of their wo;) and much more with this, that though God had seemed to be their Enemy, and to fight against them, yet he was still so far their Friend, and an Enemy to their enemies, that he *resented*, and would *revenge*, the indignities done them.

In these verses, we have the doom of the Philistines, who were near neighbours, and old enemies, to the people of Israel. Five lordships there were in that country; only four are here named, *Gaza* and *Ashkelon*, *Ashdod* and *Ekron*; Gath, the fifth, is not named; some think, because it was now subject to Judah. They were the *inhabitants of the sea-coasts*, (v. 5.) for their country lay upon the Great sea. The *nation of the Cherethites* is here joined with them, which bordered upon them, (1 Sam. xxx. 14.) and fell with them, as is foretold also, Ezek. xxv. 16. The Philistines' land is here called *Canaan*, for it belonged to that country which God gave to his people Israel, and was inserted in the grant made to them, Josh. xiii. 3. This land is yet to be possessed, (*five lords of the Philistines*;) so that they wrongfully kept Israel out of the possession of it, (Judg. iii. 3.) which is now remembered against them. For though the rights of others may be long detained unjustly, the righteous God will at length avenge the wrong.

1. It is here foretold that the Philistines, the usurpers, shall be *dispossessed* and quite extirpated. In general, here is a wo to them, (v. 5.) which, coming from God, speaks all misery; *The word of the Lord is against them*—the word of the former prophets, which, though not yet accomplished, will be in its season, Isa. xiv. 31. This word, now by this prophet, is against them. Note, Those are really in a woful condition that have the *word of the Lord against* them, for no word of his shall fall to the ground. They that rebel against the *precepts* of God's word shall have the *threatenings* of the word against them. The effect will be no less than their destruction, (1.) God himself will be the Author of it: "*I will even destroy thee*, who can

make good what I say and will." (2.) It shall be a universal destruction, it shall extend itself to all parts of the land, both city and country. *Gaza shall be forsaken*, though now a populous city; it was foretold, (Jer. xlvii. 6.) that *baldness* should come upon Gaza; Alexander the great razed that city, and we find, (Acts viii. 26.) that Gaza was a desert. *Ashkelon shall be a desolation*, a pattern of desolation. *Ashdod shall be driven out at noon-day*; in the extremity of the scorching heat they shall have no shade, no shelter to protect them; but then, when most incommoded by the weather, they shall be forced away into captivity, which will be an aggravating circumstance of it. *Ekron likewise shall be rooted up*, that had been long taking root. The land of the Philistines shall be dispeopled, there *shall be no inhabitant*, v. 5. God made the earth *to be inhabited*, (Isa. xlv. 18.) otherwise he had made it *in vain*; but if men do not answer the end of their creation, in serving God, it is just with God that the earth should not answer the end of its creation, in serving them for a habitation; man's sin has sometimes subjected it to this *vanity*. (3.) It shall be an utter destruction. The sea-coast, which used to be a harbour for ships, and a habitation for merchants, shall now be deserted, and be only *cottages for shepherds*, and *folds for flocks*, (v. 6.) and then perhaps put to better use than when it was possessed by the lords of the Philistines.

2. It is here foretold that the house of Judah, the rightful owners, shall *recover the possession* of it, v. 7. The remnant of them that shall *return out of captivity*, when God visits them, shall be made to *lie down in safety in the houses of Ashkelon*; to lie down in the evening, when they are weary and sleepy. There *they shall feed* themselves and their flocks. Note, God will at length restore his people to their rights, though they may be long kept out from them.

3. I have heard the reproach of Moab, and the revilings of the children of Ammon, whereby they have reproached my people, and magnified *themselves* against their border. 9. Therefore, *as I live*, saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, Surely Moab shall be as Sodom, and the children of Ammon as Gomorrah, *even* the breeding of nettles; and salt-pits, and a perpetual desolation: the residue of my people shall spoil them, and the remnant of my people shall possess them. 10. This shall they have for their pride, because they have reproached and magnified *themselves* against the people of the LORD of hosts. 11. The LORD *will be terrible* unto them: for he will famish all the gods of the earth; and *men* shall worship him, every one from his place, *even* all the isles of the heathen.

The Moabites and Ammonites were both of the posterity of Lot; their countries joined; and, both adjoining to Israel, they are here put together in the prophecy against them.

1. They are both charged with *the same crime*, and that was, reproaching and reviling the people of God, and triumphing in their calamities; (v. 8.) *They have reproached my people*; while God's people kept close to their duty, it is probable that they reproached them for the singularities of their religion; and now that they had revolted from God,

and were fallen under his displeasure, they reproached them for that too. It has been the common lot of God's people in all ages, to be *reproached* and *reviled* upon one account or other; thus the old serpent spits his venom; and *pride* is at the bottom of it, it is in *their pride* that they have *magnified themselves against the people of the Lord of hosts*, thinking themselves as good as they, as great, and every way as happy. It is the *contempt of the proud* that God's people are filled with, Ps. cxxiii. 4. They have *spoken big* (so some read it, *magna locuti sunt*—they have spoken great things) *against their border*; (v. 8.) against those of them that bordered upon their country, whom upon all occasions they insulted; or against the *property* they claimed, which they disputed, or the *protection* they boasted of, which they ridiculed; they *spake big against the people of the Lord of hosts* as a deserted, abandoned people; *great swelling words of vanity* are the genuine language of the church's enemies. "But I have heard them," (says God,) "and will let you know that I have heard them, I have heard, and I will reckon for them," Jude 15. And if God hears the reproaches and revilings we are under, it is a good reason why we should be as a *deaf man that hears not*, Ps. xxxviii. 14, 15. Nay, God not only takes notice of, but interests himself in, the reproaches cast on his people, because they are *his*; and it is certain, that they who look with disdain upon the people of the Lord of hosts, thereby dishonour the Lord of hosts himself. See this very thing charged on Moab and Ammon, Ezek. xxv. 3, 8.

2. They are both laid under the same doom. Associates in iniquity may expect to be such in desolation. See with what solemnity sentence is pronounced upon them, v. 9. It is the *Lord of hosts*, the sovereign Lord of all, who has authority to pass this sentence, and ability to execute it; it is the God of Israel who is jealous for their honour, it is he that has said it, nay, he has sworn it. *As I live, said the Lord*. The sentence is, (1.) That the Moabites and Ammonites shall be quite destroyed; they shall be as Sodom and as Gomorrah, the marks of whose ruins in the Dead sea lay near adjoining to the countries of Moab and Ammon; they shall, though not by the same means, (even fire from heaven,) yet almost in the same manner, be laid waste; not again to be inhabited, or not of a long time. The country shall produce nothing but *nettles*, instead of corn; and there shall be *brine-pits*, instead of the pleasant fountains of water, with which the country had abounded. (2.) That Israel shall be too hard for them; shall *spoil them* of their goods, and *possess* their country by lawful war. Note, Proud men sometimes, by the just judgment of God, fall under the mortification of being trampled upon themselves by those whom once they haughtily trampled upon. And *this shall they have for their pride*.

3. Other nations shall in like manner be humbled, that the Lord alone may be exalted; (v. 11.) *The Lord will be terrible* unto the Moabites and Ammonites in particular, who have made themselves a terror to his Israel. (1.) *Heathen gods must be abolished*; they have long had possession, and their worshippers have both glorified them, and gloried in them. But *the Lord will famish all the gods of the earth*, will starve them out of their strong holds. The Pagans had a fond conceit, that their idols were *regaled* by their offerings, and did *eat the fat of their sacrifices*, Deut. xxxii. 38. *Omnia comesta à Belo*—*Bel has eaten all*. But it is here promised that when the Christian religion is set up in the world, men shall be turned from the service of these dumb idols, shall forsake their altars, and bring no more sacrifices to them, and thus they shall be *famished*, or made *lean*, as the word is; their priests

shall. This speaks the *vanity* of those idols, it lies in the power of their worshippers to *famish* them; whereas the true God says, *If I were hungry, I would not tell thee*. It speaks also the *victory* of the God of Israel over them; *Now know we, that he is greater than all gods*. (2.) *Heathen nations must be converted*; when the gospel gets ground, by it men shall be brought to *worship him* who lives for ever, (for that is the command of the everlasting gospel, Rev. xiv. 7.) *every one from his place*; they shall not need to go up to Jerusalem, to worship the God of Israel, but, wherever they are, they may have access to him. *I will that men pray every where*. God shall be worshipped, not only by all the tribes of Israel, and the strangers who join themselves to them, but by all the *isles of the heathen*; this is a promise which looks favourably upon our native country, for it is one of the most considerable of the isles of the Gentiles, by which God will be glorified.

12. Ye Ethiopians also, ye *shall be slain* by my sword. 13. And he will stretch out his hand against the north, and destroy Assyria; and will make Nineveh a desolation, and dry like a wilderness. 14. And flocks shall lie down in the midst of her, all the beasts of the nations: both the cormorant and the bittern shall lodge in the upper lintels of it; *their voice shall sing in the windows*; desolation *shall be* in the thresholds: for he shall uncover the cedar-work. 15. This *is* the rejoicing city that dwelt carelessly; that said in her heart, *I am and there is none beside me*: how is she become a desolation, a place for beasts to lie down in! every one that passeth by her shall hiss, and wag his hand.

The cup is *going round*, when Nebuchadnezzar is *going on* conquering and to conquer: and not only Israel's near neighbours, but those that lay more remote, must be reckoned with for the wrongs they had done to God's people; the Ethiopians and the Assyrians are here taken to task.

1. The Ethiopians, or Arabians, that had sometimes been a terror to Israel, (as in Asa's time, 2 Chron. xiv. 9.) must now be reckoned with. They shall be *slain by my sword*, v. 12. Nebuchadnezzar was *God's sword*, the instrument in his hand, with which these and other enemies were subdued and punished, Ps. xvii. 14.

2. The Assyrians, and Nineveh the head city of their monarchy, are next set to the bar, to receive their doom. He that is God's sword, will *stretch out his hand against the north, and destroy Assyria*, and make himself master of it. Assyria had been the rod of God's anger against Israel, and now Babylon is the rod of God's anger against Assyria, Isa. xi. 5. He will *make Nineveh a desolation*, as has been lately and largely foretold by the prophet Nahum. Observe,

(1.) How flourishing Nineveh's estate had formerly been, (v. 15.) *This is the rejoicing city that dwelt carelessly*. Nineveh was so *strong*, that she feared no *evil*, and therefore *dwelt carelessly*, and set danger at defiance; she was so *rich*, that she thought herself sure of all *good*, and therefore was a *rejoicing city*, full of mirth and gaiety; and she had such a dominion, that she admitted no rival, but said in her heart, *"I am, and there is none beside me that can compare with me, no city in the world that can pretend to be equal with me."* God



can with his judgments frighten the most secure, humble the most haughty, and mar the mirth of those that most *laugh now*.

(2.) How complete Nineveh's ruin shall now be; it shall be made a *desolation*, v. 13. Such a heap of ruins shall this once pompous city be, that it shall be, [1.] A receptacle for beasts, such a wilderness, that *flocks shall lie down in it*; nay, such a waste, desolate, frightful place, that wild beasts, the *beasts of the nations*, all kinds of beasts, shall take up their abode there; the melancholy birds, as the *cormorant and bittern*, shall make their nests in what remains of the houses, as they sometimes do in old ruinous buildings that are uninhabited and unfrequented. The lintels, or chapters of the pillars, the *windows and thresholds*, and all the fine *cedar-work* curiously engraven, shall lie exposed; and on them these rueful, ominous birds shall perch, and their *voice shall sing*. How are the songs of mirth turned into hideous, horrid noises! What little reason have men to be proud of stately buildings, and rich furniture, when they know not what all the pomp of them may come to at last. [2.] A derision to travellers. They that had come from far, to gratify their curiosity with the sight of Nineveh's splendour, shall now look on her with as much contempt as ever they looked upon her with admiration; (v. 15.) *Every one that passes by shall hiss at her, and wag his hand*, making light of her desolations, nay, and making sport with them; "There is an end of proud Nineveh." They shall not *weep*, and *wring their hands*, (their adversities are unpitied and unlamented, who were insolent and haughty in their prosperity,) but they shall *hiss and wag their hands*, forgetting that perhaps their own ruin is not far off.

### CHAP. III.

We now return to Jerusalem, and must again hear what God has to say to her, I. By way of reproof and threatening, for the abundance of wickedness that was found in her; of which divers instances are given, with the aggravations of them, v. 1. . 7. II. By way of promise of mercy and grace, which God had yet in reserve for them. Two general heads of promises here are, 1. That God would bring in a glorious work of reformation among them, cleanse them from their sins, and bring them home to himself; many promises of this kind here are, v. 8. . 13. 2. That he would bring about a glorious work of salvation for them, when he had thus prepared them for it, v. 14. . 20. Thus the *Redeemer shall come to Zion*, and, to clear his own way, shall *turn away ungodliness from Jacob*. These promises were to have their full accomplishment in gospel-times and gospel-graces.

1. **W**O to her that is filthy and polluted, to the oppressing city! 2. She obeyed not the voice; she received not correction: she trusted not in the LORD; she drew not near to her God. 3. Her princes within her *are roaring lions*; her judges *are evening wolves*; they gnaw not the bones till the morrow. 4. Her prophets *are light and treacherous persons*: her priests have polluted the sanctuary, they have done violence to the law. 5. The just LORD *is in the midst thereof*; he will not do iniquity: every morning doth he bring his judgment to light, he faileth not; but the unjust knoweth no shame. 6. I have cut off the nations: their towers are desolate; I made their streets waste, that none passeth by: their cities are destroyed, so that there is no

man, that there is none inhabitant. 7. I said, Surely thou wilt fear me, thou wilt receive instruction: so their dwelling should not be cut off, howsoever I punished them: but they rose early, and corrupted all their doings.

One would wonder that Jerusalem, the holy city where God was *known*, and his name was *great*, should be the city of which this *black character* is here given; that a place which enjoyed such plenty of the means of grace, should become so very corrupt and vicious, and that God should permit it to be so; yet so it is, to show that *the law made nothing perfect*; but if this be the *true character* of Jerusalem, as no doubt it is, (for God's judgments will make none worse than they are,) it is no wonder that the prophet begins with *wo to her*. For the holy God hates sin in those that are nearest to him, nay, in them he hates it most. A *sinful* state is, and will be, a *woful* state.

1. Here is a very bad character given of the city in general; how is the faithful city become a harlot! 1. She *shames herself*; she is *filthy and polluted*, has made herself *infamous*; (so some read it; v. 1.) *the gluttonous city*, (so the margin,) always cramming, and making provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts of it. Sin is the filthiness and pollution of persons and places, and makes them odious in the sight of the holy God. 2. She *wrongs* her neighbours and inhabitants; she is the *oppressing city*; never any place had *statutes and judgments so righteous* as this city had, and yet, in the administration of the government, never was more unrighteousness. 3. She is very *provoking* to her God, and in every respect *walks contrary* to him, v. 2. He has given his law, and spoken to her by his servants the prophets, telling her what is the good she should do, and what the evil she should avoid; but she *obeyed not his voice*, nor made conscience of doing as he commanded her, in any thing. He has taken her under an excellent discipline, both of the word and of the rod; but she *did not receive* the instruction of the one, or the correction of the other; did not submit to God's will, nor answer his end in either. He encouraged her to depend upon him, and his power and promise, for deliverance from evil, and supply with good; but she *trusted not in the Lord*; her confidence was placed in her alliances with the nations more than in her covenant with God. He gave her tokens of his presence, and instituted ordinances of communion for her with himself; but she *drew not near to her God*, did not meet him where he appointed, and where he promised to meet her. She stood at a distance, and *said to the Almighty, Depart*.

II. Here is a very bad character of the leading men in it; those that should by their influence suppress vice and profaneness there, are the great patterns and patrons of it; and those that should be her physicians, are really her worst disease. 1. Her *princes* are ravenous and barbarous as *roaring lions* that make a prey of all about them; and they are universally feared and hated; they use their power for destruction, and not for edification. 2. Her *judges*, who should be the protectors of injured innocence, are *evening wolves*, rapacious and greedy, and their cruelty and covetousness both insatiable; *They gnaw not the bones till the morrow*; they take so much delight and pleasure in cruelty and oppression, that when they have devoured a good man, they reserve the bones, as it were, for a sweet morsel, to be gnawed the next morning, Job xxxi. 31. 3. Her *prophets*, who pretended to be special messengers from heaven to them, were *light and treacherous persons*, fanciful, and of a vain imagination,

frothy and airy, and of a loose conversation, men of no consistency with themselves, in whom one could put no confidence; they were so given to bantering, that it was hard to say when they were serious. Their pretended prophecies were all a sham, and they secretly laughed at those that were deluded by them. 4. *Her priests*, who were teachers by office, and had the charge of the holy things, were false to their trust, and betrayed it: they were to preserve the purity of the *sanctuary*, but they did themselves *pollute* it, and the sacred offices of it, which they were to attend upon; such priests as Hophni and Phinehas, who by their wicked lives *made the sacrifices of the Lord to be abhorred*. They were to expound and apply the *law*, and to judge according to it; but in their explications and applications of it, they *did violence to the law*; they corrupted the sense of it, and perverted it to the patronizing of that which was directly contrary to it; by forced constructions, they made the law to speak what they pleased, to serve a turn, and so, in effect, *made void the law*.

III. We have here the aggravations of this general corruption of all orders and degrees of men in Jerusalem.

1. They had the tokens of God's presence among them, and all the advantages that could be of knowing his will, with the strongest inducements possible to do it, and yet they persisted in their disobedience, *v. 5.* (1.) They had the honour and privilege of the Shechinah, God's dwelling in their land, so as he dwelt not with any other people; "*The just Lord is in the midst of thee, to take cognizance of all thou doest amiss, and give countenance to all thou doest well; he is in the midst of thee as a holy God, and therefore thy pollutions are the more offensive*, Deut. xxiii. 14. He is in the midst of thee as a *just God*, and therefore will punish the affronts you put upon him, and the wrongs and injuries you do to one another." (2.) They had God's own example set before them, in the discovery he made of himself to them, that they might conform to it; *He will not do iniquity, and therefore you should not; for this was the great rule of their institution, "Be ye holy, for I am holy.* God will be true to you, be ye not you then false to him." (3.) He sent to them his prophets, rising up early and sending them; *Every morning he brings his judgment to light*, as duly as the morning comes, *he fails not*; he shows them plainly what the good is which he requires of them, and puts them in mind of it; *he awakens morning by morning*, (Isa. 1. 4.) awakens his prophets with the rising sun, to bring to light the things which belong to their peace. So that upon the whole matter, what more could have been done to his vineyard, to make it fruitful? Isa. v. 4. And yet, after all, the *unjust know no shame*; they that have been unjust are unjust still, and are not ashamed of their unrighteousness, *neither can they blush*. If they had any sense of honour, any shame left in them, they would not go so directly contrary to their profession, and to the instructions given them. But they that are past shame are past cure.

2. God has set before their eyes some remarkable monuments of his justice, which were designed for warning to them; (*v. 6.*) *I have cut off the nations*, the seven nations of Canaan, which the land spewed out for their wickedness; upon which they had this caution given them, to take heed lest it *shew them our also*, Lev. xviii. 28. Or, it may refer to some of the neighbouring nations that were made desolate for their wickedness, especially to the nation of Israel, the ten tribes; their *towers were desolate*, their high towers, their strong towers, their pride and power broken, their *streets wasted*, so that none passed along through them; the *cities were destroyed* and laid in ruins, *no man* was to be found

in them, *no inhabitant*, all were slain, or carried into captivity. The enemies did it, but God avows it; *I cut them off*, says he. And God designed this for an admonition to Jerusalem; (Ezek. xxiii. 9, 11.) "*I said, Surely thou wilt fear me, surely these judgments upon others will deter thee from the like wicked practices; surely thou wilt receive instruction by these providences; it ought reasonably to be expected, that thou wouldest not continue to sin like the nations, when thou seest the ruin which their sin brought upon them.*" They could not but see their own house in danger, when their neighbour's was on fire: and when we are *frightened* God should be *feared*.

3. He had set before them life and death, good and evil, both in his word and in his providence. (1.) He had assured them of the continuance of their prosperity, if they would *fear him and receive instruction*, for so *their dwelling would not be cut off* as their neighbour's was; if they took the warning given them, and reformed, what was past should be pardoned, and their tranquillity lengthened out. (2.) He had made them feel the smart of the rod, though he reprieved them from the sword; *Howsoever I punish them*, that, being chastened, they might not be condemned: such various methods did God take with them, to reclaim them, but all in vain; they were not won upon by gentle methods, nor had severe ones any effect, for *they rose early, and corrupted all their doings*; they were more resolute and eager in their wicked courses than ever; more studious and solicitous in making provision for their lusts, and let slip no opportunity for the gratification of them. God *rose up early* to send them his *prophets, to reduce and reclaim* them, but they were *up before him*, to shut and bolt the door against them. Their wickedness was universal; *all their doings were corrupted*, and it was all owing to themselves, they could not lay the blame upon the tempter, but they alone must bear it; they themselves wilfully and designedly *corrupted all their doings; for every man is tempted, when he is drawn aside of his own lust and enticed*.

8. Therefore wait ye upon me, saith the LORD, until the day that I rise up to the prey; for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, *even* all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy. 9. For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent. 10. From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia my suppliants, *even* the daughter of my dispersed, shall bring mine offering. 11. In that day shalt thou not be ashamed for all thy doings, wherein thou hast transgressed against me: for then I will take away out of the midst of thee them that rejoice in thy pride; and thou shalt no more be haughty because of my holy mountain. 12. I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the LORD. 13. The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth: for they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make *them* afraid

Things looked very bad with Jerusalem in the foregoing verses; she is got into a very bad name, and seems to be incorrigible, incurable, mercy-proof and judgment-proof. Now one would think it should follow, therefore expect no other but that she should be utterly abandoned and rejected, as *reprobate silver*; since they will not be wrought upon by prophets or providences, let them be made a desolation as their neighbours have been: but behold, and wonder at, the riches of divine grace, which takes occasion, from man's badness, to appear so much the more illustrious. They still grew worse and worse; *therefore wait ye upon me, saith the Lord, v. 8.* Since the law, it seems, will make *nothing perfect*, the *bringing in of a better hope shall*; let those that lament the corruptions of the church, *wait upon God*, till he send his Son into the world, to *save his people from their sins*, till he send his gospel to reform and refine his church, and to purify to himself a peculiar people both of Jews and Gentiles. And there were those who, according to this direction and encouragement, *waited for redemption*, for this redemption in Jerusalem; and long-looked for came at last, Luke ii. 38. *For judgment Christ will come into this world*, John ix. 39.

I. To *avenge* what has been *done amiss against his church*, to bring down and destroy the enemies of it, its spiritual enemies; of which the destruction of Babylon, and other the oppressors of God's people, in the Old Testament times, was a type, and would be a happy presage. He will *rise up to the prey, to lead captivity captive*, (Ps. lxxviii. 18.) to conquer and spoil the powers of darkness, and the powers on earth, that set themselves *against the Lord and his anointed*; he will *break them with a rod of iron*, (Ps. ii. v. 9.—xi. 5, 6.) his *determination is to gather the nations*, and to *assemble the kingdoms*. By the gospel of Christ preached to every creature all nations are summoned, as it were, to appear in a body before the Lord Jesus, who is about to set up his kingdom in the world. But since the greatest part of mankind will not obey the summons, he will *pour upon them his indignation*, for he that *believes not is condemned already*. At the time of the setting up of the kingdom of the Messiah, there shall be on earth *distress of nations with perplexity*, (Luke xxi. 25.) *great tribulation*, such as *never was, or ever shall be*, Matth. xxiv. 21. Then God pours upon the nations his *indignation*, even all his *fiere anger* for their *indignation and fierce anger* against the Messiah and his kingdom, Ps. ii. 1, 2. *Then all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of his jealousy*. Both Jews and Gentiles shall be reckoned with for their enmity to the gospel. Principalities and powers shall be *spoiled*, and *made a show of openly*, and the victorious Redeemer shall triumph over them. The end of those that continue to be *of the earth, and to mind earthly things*, after God has set up the kingdom of heaven among men *shall be destruction*, (Phil. iii. 19.) they shall be *devoured with the fire of God's jealousy*.

II. To *amend* what he *finds amiss in his church*. When God intends the restoration of Israel, and the revival of their peace and prosperity, he makes way for it by their reformation, and the revival of their virtue and piety; for this is God's method, both with particular persons and with communities, first, to make them holy, and then to make them happy. These promises were in part accomplished after the return of the Jews out of Babylon, when by their captivity they were thoroughly cured of their idolatry; and this was all the fruit, even the taking away of sin; but it looks further, to the blessed effects of the gospel, and the grace of it, to those *times of reformation* in which we live, Heb. ix. 10.

1. It is promised that there shall be a reformation in men's discourse, which had been generally cor-

rupt, but should now be with grace seasoned with salt; (v. 9.) *Then will I turn to the people a pure language*; I will turn the people to such a language, from that *evil communication* which had almost ruined all *good manners* among them. Note, Converting grace *refines the language*, not by making the phrases *witty*, but the substance *wise*. Among the Jews, after the captivity, there needed a reformation of the dialect, for they had mingled the language of Canaan with that of Ashdod; (Neh. iii. 24.) and that grievance shall be redressed. But that is not all; their language shall be purified from all profaneness, filthiness and falsehood; I will turn them to a *choice language*; so some read it; they shall not speak rashly, but with caution and deliberation; they shall *choose out their words*. Note, An air of purity and piety in common conversation is a very happy omen to any people; other graces, other blessings, shall be given where God gives a pure language to those that have been a *people of unclean lips*.

2. That the worship of God, according to his will, shall be more closely applied to, and more unanimously concurred in. Instead of sacrifice and incense, they shall *call upon the name of the Lord*, prayer is the spiritual offering with which God must be honoured; and to prepare and fit us for that duty, it is necessary that we have a *pure language*. We are utterly unfit to take God's name into our lips, unless they be *pure lips*. The purifying of the language in common conversation, is necessary to the acceptableness of the words of our mouth, and the meditation of our heart in our devotion; for how can *sweet waters* and *bitter* come out of the same fountain? James iii. 9.—12. It is likewise promised that their language being thus purified, they shall serve God *with one consent*; with *one shoulder*, so the word is; alluding to oxen in the yoke, that draw even; when Christians are unanimous in the service of God, the work goes on cheerfully. This is the effect of the *pure language*, purified from passion, envy, and censoriousness. Note, Purity is the way to unity; the reformation of manners the way to a comprehension; the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable.

3. That those that were driven from God, shall return to him, and be accepted of him; (v. 10.) *From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia*; from Egypt, so described, (Isa. xlviii. 1.) or from some other very remote country, *my suppliants, even the daughter of my dispersed, shall bring mine offering*. Those that by reason of their *distance* had almost forgotten God, and their obligations to him, shall be put in mind of him, as the prodigal son was of his father's house, in the far country. These that by reason of their *dispersion*, under the tokens of his displeasure, might be afraid of coming to him, yet even they shall be gathered under his wings; the *daughter of his dispersed*, that is *afar off*, will be found among those whom the Lord our God shall call; and though they are *dispersed* he will own them for his; his calling them *my dispersed*, puts honour upon them, sufficient to balance all the disgrace of their dispersion. These shall come, (1.) With their humble petitions; They are *my suppliants*. Note, True converts are *suppliants* to God; they do not plead, but *make supplication to their Judge*; (Job ix. 15.) and, wherever they are, though *beyond the rivers of Ethiopia*, a great way off from his house of prayer, he has his eye upon them, and his ear open to them, they are *his suppliants*. (2.) With their spiritual sacrifices *they shall bring mine offering*; shall bring themselves as spiritual sacrifices to God, Rom. xii. 1. The conversion of the Gentiles is called the *offering up of the Gentiles*, (Rom. xv. 16.) and with themselves they shall bring the gospel-sacrifices of prayer, and praise, and alms, with which God is well pleased.

4. That sin and sinners shall be purged out from among them, *v.* 11. God will take away, (1.) Their just reproach; *In that day shalt thou not be ashamed for all thy doings.* They shall be ashamed as *penitents*, and shall continue to be so, (see Ezek. xvi. 63.) but they shall not be ashamed as sinners that return to folly again; "*Thou shalt not be ashamed, thou shalt no more do a shameful thing, as thou hast done.*" The guilt of sin being taken away by pardoning mercy, the reproach of it shall be rolled away from the sinner's own conscience, that being *purified, and pacified, and cleansed from dead works.* When wickedness and wicked people abound in a nation, those few in it that are good, are ashamed of them, and of their land; but when sinners are converted, and the land reformed, that shame and the cause of it are removed. (2.) Their unjust glorying; "*I will take away out of the midst of thee, not only the profane, who are a shame to thy land, but the hypocrites, who appear beautiful outwardly, and rejoice in thy pride, in the holy city, the holy house;*" these were indeed Israel's glory, but they made them their *pride*, and *rejoiced* in them, as if they were an invincible bulwark, to secure them in their sinful ways; they relied on them as their *righteousness* and strength, boasting of *the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord*; (Jer. vii. 4.) they were *haughty because of the holy mountain*; were conceited of themselves, scornful of others, and set even the judgments of God at defiance. Note, Church-privileges, when they are not duly improved as they ought to be, are often made the matter of men's pride, and the ground of their security. But that *haughtiness* is of all other the most offensive to God, which is supported and fed by the pretensions of holiness. This God will *silence* and take away.

5. That God will have a remnant of holy, humble, serious people among them, that shall have the comfort of their relation to him, and interest in him; (*v.* 12.) *I will leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people.* When the Chaldeans carried away the Jews into captivity, they left the *poor of the land for vine-dressers and husbandmen*, a type and figure of God's distinguished remnant, whom he sets apart for himself; they are *afflicted and poor*, low in the world; such *God has chosen*, James ii. 5. The poor are evangelized, low in their own eyes, afflicted for sin, poor in spirit. They are God's *leaving*, for it is a remnant according to the election of grace. *I have reserved them to myself*, says God, (Rom. xi. 4, 5.) and *they shall trust in the name of the Lord*. Note, Those whom God designs for the glory of his name, he enables to *trust in his name*. And the greater their affliction and poverty in the world are, the more reason they see to trust in God, having nothing else to trust to, 1 Tim. v. 5.

6. That this select remnant shall be blessed with purity and peace, *v.* 13. (1.) They shall be blessed with *purity*, both in words and actions; they shall neither *do iniquity*, nor *speak lies*. Justice and veracity shall command them, and govern them, though it be ever so much against their secular interest. They shall not only not speak a direct, deliberate lie, but *there shall not be a deceitful tongue found in their mouth*, not in the mouth of any of them; not the least equivocation shall come from them. (2.) They shall be blessed with *peace*. They shall, as the sheep of God's pasture, *feed, and lie down, and none shall make them afraid*. They shall not be *fearful* themselves, nor shall any about them be *frightful* to them. Note, Those that are careful not to *do iniquity*, need not be afraid of any calamity, for it cannot *hurt* them, and therefore should not *terrify* them.

14. Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O

Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem. 15. The LORD hath taken away thy judgments, he hath cast out thine enemy: the king of Israel, *even the LORD*, is in the midst of thee: thou shalt not see evil any more. 16. In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear thou not; and to Zion, Let not thy hands be slack. 17. The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love; he will joy over thee with singing. 18. I will gather *them that are sorrowful* for the solemn assembly *who are of thee, to whom the reproach of it was a burden.* 19. Behold, at that time I will undo all that afflict thee; and I will save her that halteth, and gather her that was driven out; and I will get them praise and fame in every land where they have been put to shame. 20. At that time will I bring you *again*, even in the time that I gather you: for I will make you a name and a praise among all people of the earth, when I turn back your captivity before your eyes, saith the LORD.

After the promises of taking away of sin, here follow promises of the taking away of trouble; for when the cause is removed, the effect will cease. What makes a people *holy*, will make them *happy* of course. The precious promises here made to the purified people, were to have their full accomplishments in the comforts of the gospel; in the hope, and much more in the enjoyment, of which, they are here called upon, (1.) To rejoice and sing; (*v.* 14.) *Sing, O daughter of Zion, sing for joy, shout, O Israel*, in a holy transport and exultation; *be glad and rejoice with all the heart*; let the joy be inward, let it be great; those that love God *with all their heart* have occasion with all their heart to *rejoice in him*. It was promised, (*v.* 13.) that their sins should be mortified, and their fears silenced, and then follows, *Sing and rejoice*. Note, Those that *reform*, have cause to *rejoice*; whereas Israel cannot rejoice for joy as other people, while she goes a whoring from her God. God's promises, applied by faith, furnish the saints with constant and abundant matter for joy; they are filled with joy and peace in believing them. (2.) To throw off all their discouragements; (*v.* 10.) *In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem*, God will say it by his prophets, by his providences, their neighbours shall say it, they shall say it to one another, "*Fear thou not, be not disposed to fear, do not easily admit the impressions of it; when things are bad, fear not their being worse, but hope they will mend; frighten not thyself upon every occasion. Let not thy hands be slack or faint; wring not thy hands in despair, drop not thy hands in despondency, disfit not thyself for thy work and warfare, by giving way to doubts and fears. Pluck up thy spirits, and, in token of that, lift up thy hands, the hands that hang down*, Heb. xii. 12. Isa. xxxv. 2. Lift up thy hands in prayer to God, lift up thy hands to help thyself." *Fear* makes the hands *slack*, but faith and hope make them vigorous, and the joy of the Lord will be our strength both for doing and suffering.

Let us now see what these precious promises are, which are here made to the people of God, for the banishing of their griefs and fears, and the encourag-

ing of their hopes and joys; and to us are these promises made as well as to them.

1. An end shall be put to all their troubles and distresses; (v. 15.) "*The Lord has taken away thy judgments; has removed all the calamities thou hast been groaning under, which were the punishments of thy sin; the noise of war shall be silenced, the reproach of famine done away, and the captivity brought back. Though some grievances remain, they shall be only afflictions, and not judgments, for sin shall be pardoned. He has cast out thine enemy, that has thrust himself into thy land, and triumphed over thee. He has swept out thine enemy,*" (so some read it,) "*as dirt is swept out of the house to the dunghill.*" When they sweep out their sins with the besom of reformation, God will sweep out their enemies with the besom of destruction. If they should need correction, they shall fall into the hands of the Lord, whose mercies are great, and shall not again fall into the hands of man, whose tender mercies are cruel; *Thou shalt not see evil any more, not such evil days as thou hast seen.* Note, The way to get clear of the evil of trouble, is to keep clear from the evil of sin; and to them that do so, trouble has no real evil in it.

2. God will give them the tokens of his presence with them; though he has long seemed to stand at a distance, (they having provoked him to withdraw,) he will make it to appear that he is *with them of a truth*; "*The Lord is in the midst of thee, O Zion, of thee, O Jerusalem*, as the sun in the centre of the universe, to diffuse his light and influence upon every part. He is *in the midst of thee*, to preside in all thine affairs, and to take care of all thine interests." And, (1.) "He is the *King of Israel*, (v. 15.) and is in the midst of thee as a King in the midst of his people." With an eye to this, our Lord Jesus is called the *King of Israel*; (John i. 49.) and he is, and will be, in the midst of his church always, even to the end of the world, to receive the homage of his subjects, and to give out his favours to them, even where but *two or three are gathered together in his name*. (2.) "He is the Lord thy God, thine in covenant, and he is in the midst of thee as *thy God*, whom thou hast an interest in, and whose own thou art. He has put himself into dear relations to thee, laid himself by promise under obligations to thee, and, that thou mayest have abundant comfort in both, he is *in the midst of thee*, nigh at hand to answer both." (3.) "He that is in the midst of thee as *thy God and King*, is *mighty*, is almighty, is able to do all that for thee that thou needest, and canst desire." (4.) "He has engaged his power for thy succour; *He will save; he will be Jesus*; will answer the name, for he will save his people from their sins."

3. God will take delight in them, and in doing them good. The expressions of this are very lively and affecting; (v. 17.) *He will rejoice over thee with joy*, will not only be well pleased with thee upon thy repentance and reformation, and take thee into favour, but will take a complacency in thee, as the bridegroom does in his bride, or the bride in her ornaments, Isa. lxii. 3.—5. The conversion of sinners and the consolation of saints are the joy of angels, for they are the joy of God himself. The church should be the *joy of the whole earth*, (Ps. xlviii. 2.) for it is the *joy of the whole heaven*. He will *rest in his love, will be silent in his love*; so the word is, "I will not rebuke thee as I have done, for thy sins; I will acquiesce in thee, and in my relation to thee." I know not where there is the like expression of Christ's love to his church, unless in that song of songs, Cant. iv. 9. *Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse, with one of thine eyes.* O the condescensions of divine grace! The great God not only loves his saints, but *he loves to love them*, is

pleased that he has pitched upon these objects of his love. *He will joy over them with singing.* He that is grieved for the sin of sinners, rejoices in the graces and services of the saints, and is ready to express that joy, by singing over them. *The Lord takes pleasure in them that fear him*, and in them Jesus Christ will shortly be glorified and admired.

4. God will comfort Zion's mourners, who sympathize with her in her griefs, and will wipe away their tears; (v. 18.) *I will gather them who are sorrowful for the solemn assemblies, to whom the reproach of it was a burthen.* See, (1.) Who are they whom God will rejoice in, and make to rejoice; they are such as are sorrowful. They only must expect to reap in joy, that sow in tears. The sorrowful now shall be for ever joyful. (2.) What is the great matter of sorrow to Zion's mourners, when Zion is in mourning. Many are her calamities—the city is ruined, and the palaces are demolished; trade is at an end, and the administration of public justice; but all these are nothing to them, in comparison with the desolations of the sanctuary, the destruction of the temple and the altar; to attend on which, in solemn feasts, all Israel used to come together three times a year. It is for those sacred, *solemn assemblies* that they are sorrowful. [1.] Because they are *dispersed*; there is no temple to come up to, or, if there were, no people to come up to it; so that the *solemn feasts and sabbaths are forgotten in Zion*, Lam. ii. 6. Note, The restraining of public assemblies for religious worship, the scattering of them by their enemies, or the forsaking of them by their friends, so that either there are no assemblies, or not solemn ones, is a very *sorrowful* thing to all good people. If the ways of Zion mourn, the sons of Zion mourn too. And hereby they make it to appear that they are indeed of Zion, living members of that body with the grievances of which they are so sensibly affected. [2.] Because they are *despised*; the reproach of the *solemn assemblies* is a burthen to them. It had been the lot of the *solemn assemblies* to lie under a great deal of reproach. Satan and his instruments having a particular spite at them, as the great support of the interest of God's kingdom among men. Black and odious characters have been put upon those assemblies; and this is a burthen to all those that have a cordial concern for the glory of God, and the welfare of the souls of men. They reckon that the reproaches of those who reproach the solemn assemblies, fall upon them, fall foul upon them.

5. God will recover the captives out of the hands of their oppressors, and bring home the banished that seemed to be expelled, v. 19, 20. (1.) Their enemies shall be *disabled to detain them* in bondage. "*At that time I will undo all that afflict thee*, will break their power, and blast their counsels, so that they shall be forced to surrender the prey they have taken." *Conficiam*—"I will take them to task, I will be doing with them shortly, and so as to make an end of them." Note, Those that abuse and oppress God's people, take the ready way to undo themselves. (2.) They shall be *enabled to assert and recover their liberty*, and all the difficulties in the way of it shall be surmounted. Is the church weak and wounded? *I will save her that halts*, as was promised, Mic. iv. 7. He will help her when she cannot help herself; even *the lame shall take the prey*, Isa. xxxiii. 23. Is she dispersed, and not likely to incorporate for her common benefit? *I will gather her that was driven out, and bring her again, at the time that I gather her.* One act of mercy and grace shall serve both to collect them out of their dispersions and to conduct them to their own land. When the *people's hearts are prepared*, the work will be *done suddenly*; and who can hinder it, if God undertake to effect it? "*I will turn back your*

*captivity before your eyes, saith the Lord; you shall plainly discern the hand of God in it, and say, This is the Lord's doing."*

6. God will by all this put honour upon them, and gain them respect from all about them. Israel was at first *made high above all nations in praise and fame*, Deut. xxvi. 19. The reproach brought upon them was therefore one of the sorest of their grievances: (nothing cuts deeper to those that are in honour, than disgrace does;) and therefore, when God returns in mercy to his church, it is here promised that she shall regain her credit; all the reproach shall be for ever rolled away, as Israel's at Gilgal, Josh. v. 9. The church shall be as honourable as ever she has been despicable. (1.) Even those that have *reproached* her, shall be made to *respect* her; *I will give them praise and fame in every land, where they have been put to shame*; that the same who were the witnesses of their disgrace, may see cause to change their mind concerning them. They that said, "This is Zion whom no man looks

after," shall say, "This is Zion whom the great God looks after." And she that was looked upon to be the *offscouring of the earth*, now appears to be the *darling of heaven*. (2.) Even those that never *knew her*, shall be brought to honour her; (*v. 20.*) *I will make you a name and a praise among all people of the earth*; so the Jewish church was, when the *fear of the Jews* fell upon their neighbours, (Esth. viii. 17.) and some of all nations said, *We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you*, Zech viii. 23. So the Christian church was, when it was made to flourish in the world, for there is that in it, which may justly recommend it to the value and esteem of all the people of the earth. And so the universal church of the first-born will be in the great day; when the saints shall be brought together to Christ, that he may be admired and glorified in them, and they admired and glorified in him before angels and men. Then will God's Israel be *made a name and a praise* to eternity.